

京大過去問 1999年 第1問

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Popular books with “nature” in their titles are sometimes stocked with pictures of particular natural objects, lakes, species of fish, and habitats. The photos or drawings are usually accompanied by word pictures or descriptions meant to evoke the image of particular objects. Because pictures by themselves are barren of any syntax, they make no contentions and construct no arguments about the objects that they represent. A picture of a shore bird encased in oil tar may or may not be an argument against offshore oil drilling.

(1)Depending on the moral understanding of the viewer, the picture may represent the tragic or the merely unfortunate, constitute an “argument” against any offshore oil drilling or for safer offshore drilling, or be met with plain indifference. To take another example, if I see a picture of a dying fish, I don’t know whether to feel good or bad until I read something like “This fish is dying because of poisonous waste spills from XYZ chemical company.” If I read instead “This fish is dying because it is old,” I will feel differently. By themselves, then, pictures do not argue with the world or anyone in it.

(2)Whether “real” pictures illustrate a text or whether the text merely clarifies the pictures, real pictures and word pictures alike silently and powerfully make a single demand: they want recognition. The picture states “Here is a particular tree; you’ll recognize it. Or if you don’t, the picture will help you recognize a tree like it, if and when you ever see one.” (3)The picture might be worth a thousand words when describing a particular tree or species of tree, but it is worth little in terms of understanding that there is a category of things in nature called “trees” — a category that exists in our minds independent of any particular real tree or species of trees.

This categorical understanding is premised on the power of abstraction, and abstraction presupposes a language that is not merely a good or poor substitute for a photograph but rather demands to be understood and argued with, that is, that represents the world not as an object but as an idea. Language depends on syntax, hence is necessary for reasoning and argumentation; pictures, by contrast, usually aid recognition much better than language does.